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ABSTRACT

Administrative reading personnel need a special program of course work and field experience to prepare them for their roles. Besides the basic developmental and remedial reading courses, the specialist trainee should also take courses in curriculum theory, statistical analysis and research design, dynamics of instructional groups, administrator behavior, and administration of the school reading program. After the specialist is on the job he should take those inservice courses that are necessary to meet the particular requirements of his job. In addition to course work, a variety of field experiences should be part of the training program. These experiences include a practicum with a "master" reading consultant and work in clinics, schools, and classrooms. These field experiences should give the trainee opportunities for active participation in both the decision-making and the implementation processes of program development. Short-term projects are beneficial if they allow the trainee to develop his own style of program development. The final benefit of field experiences should be the opportunity for the trainee to decide whether or not he is suited to fill a central office reading position. (VJ)

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PREPARING SPECIALIZED READING PERSONNEL FOR CENTRAL OFFICE POSITIONS

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Each school district must determine which aspects of its total reading program can best be provided for at a central office level. The needs and resources of school districts vary considerably, and these differences should be reflected in central office organization and operation. This is not to say that school districts have no commonalities in regard to reading curriculum development at the central office level. Sufficient similarity exists among school districts to recommend courses and supervised field experiences that are likely to be professionally useful for central office reading specialists in most school systems. The ideal is to provide courses and field experiences that are broad enough to permit the prospective specialist to draw upon his education to meet job specifications that vary from district to district.

Universities and colleges that prepare central office reading specialists can often approach the ideal in course work better than they can approach the ideal in field experiences. Books and journals that contain reports of the needs and the programs in school systems throughout the nation are available for study in courses and can help to give students a broad picture of existing conditions. On the other hand, field experiences must often be provided in public school systems that are geographically near the training institutions. Field experiences

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are more likely, therefore, to teach students how a particular school district is utilizing its central office staff to solve unique problems than provide them with a good sampling of central office operations. For example, a student who has a field experience in the central office of the Madison, Wisconsin, Public Schools may learn little that is applicable to the most pressing problems of the New York Public School System.

The recommendation, then, is that trainers of prospective central office reading specialists make special efforts to provide course work that includes some study of various school district operations in conjunction with field experiences that may be quite provincial in focus. Another possibility, of course, is to arrange field experiences in the same or in school districts similar to those in which the prospective specialist desires to obtain a position. Obviously, going out of the local area places additional burdens on the student and on supervisory personnel.

Course Work

Students who are preparing themselves to assume reading specialist responsibilities at a central office level should have had the course work required or desired of the personnel for whom they will be instructional leaders. This would include the basic developmental and remedial reading courses that are offered to teachers or building consultants in elementary, secondary, or adult reading programs. In addition, the following courses would seem particularly relevant for central office reading specialists.

Curriculum Theory. This course should consider different theoretical models and assumptions for curriculum development. Current writings and leading authorities in curriculum development should be studied.

Statistical Analysis and Design in Educational Research. This course should give some attention to designing and interpreting educational research as well as some introductory work with statistical procedures.

Dynamics of Instructional Groups. The content for this course should include research and theory on structures and processes of small groups with implications for teaching-learning procedures in small instructional groups. A desirable aspect of this course would be some encounter group experiences to help the prospective specialist analyze his own interpersonal behavior.

Administrator Behavior. The emphases in this course should be the role of administrators as instructional leaders and the nature and process of supervision for the improvement of instruction.

Guiding and Directing the School Reading Program. This course should focus upon specific aspects of reading program development that need constant attention (e.g., the utilization of specialized personnel, in-service education in reading, evaluating instructional materials, school and classroom organization for reading instruction, evaluating the reading program and evaluating individual pupil growth in the program). This course should also include the study of reading program developments throughout the nation as they are reported in the professional literature.

Certainly other courses would be helpful, but the five described here seem to be especially good adjuncts to reading methods courses given to classroom teachers and special teachers of reading. The specific course descriptions will of course vary from institution to institution, but courses similar to those that are suggested seem desirable for most, if not all, central office reading specialists. The recommended courses may

be taken prior to assuming the responsibilities of a central office job or as in-service education.

Since the responsibilities of central office specialists do vary from district to district, in-service course work would seem to be of utmost importance for central office personnel. Some school districts may see research as the major function of central office personnel. When such is the case additional course work in research techniques and statistical analysis might be taken as in-service education. Other school districts may want their central office personnel primarily to provide in-service experiences for classroom teachers or supervise classroom instruction. Additional course work to prepare central office specialists for these duties could be taken while they are on the job. The training of central office reading specialists, then, is not only a matter of pre-service education. Central office personnel are instructional leaders and as such must accept the responsibility for staying in the forefront of their profession. Therefore, in-service education is necessary for them to acquire the abilities needed for particular job responsibilities and to keep abreast of the developments in the field of reading and in fields related to reading curriculum development.

In regard to the course work taken while they are in service it has been my observation that central office reading specialists want to play an active role in the conduct of their classes. They are generally aware of their needs and want to focus their reading, class discussion and project work upon them. Consequently, problem-centered discussion sessions with certain prerequisites for student enrollment are generally preferred. The prerequisites for student enrollment are suggested because students who are far below the sophistication level of most practicing

central office specialists may be overwhelmed, bored or both by the content of the discussions and the terminology employed. This is not to say that these courses should be reserved exclusively for practicing central office reading specialists. Students who are nearing that level of learning and experience can profit and contribute much when they are encouraged to participate in class interactions. The instructor of the course does, however, need to guard against the intimidation of lesser experienced students by the enthusiasm and expertise of the more experienced.

Students from educational fields other than reading often add much to courses designed primarily for reading specialists. School psychologists, principals, researchers, librarians and other specialists add points of view and information that can be extremely enlightening to central office reading specialists. At the same time the students representing fields other than reading will be helped to acquire understandings and points of view that will ultimately result in more harmonious working relationships between reading specialists and specialists in related fields.

Field Experiences

The value of supervised field experiences for prospective central office reading specialists cannot be overemphasized. Concerning the education of reading specialists Austin (1) says, "Because the consultant is expected to assist inexperienced teachers as well as experienced ones, he should be required to complete a graduate practicum in a public school situation, in which he would work with a 'master' reading consultant. In this way he could combine theory with practice by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the problems encountered in the teaching of reading." Central office specialists, because of the broad scope of their responsibilities,

will often benefit not only from field experiences in the central office itself but also from field experiences in clinics, school buildings and classrooms which will ultimately come within the range of their responsibilities. Instructional leaders are always more effective when they have had some practical experience in the specific areas they are attempting to improve. Therefore, field experiences should be arranged to give prospective specialists work experiences in as many aspects of a total district's reading program as possible. Most aspirants to central office positions already have a background of specialized work in reading, but field experiences which enrich and broaden their backgrounds are almost always needed.

Although much can be learned by observing the work of a practicing central office reading specialist, the emphasis of field experiences should be upon active participation in both the decision-making and implementation processes of program development. No two people work alike, and the specialist in training needs to develop his own style. He needs to plan his approach, grapple with the task, and receive evaluative feedback from his supervisors and the teachers or administrators with whom he has worked directly. Feedback from the teachers or administrators with whom he has worked is especially valuable. To assure honest and helpful feedback university supervisors should make it clear to all that students taking field experiences are not expected to be finished products. By the same token, students must understand that honest criticism of their efforts is a major part of every field experience. Students who complete a field experience without an honest appraisal of their work from the principal people involved have missed a helpful dimension of their field experience.

University supervisors, public school personnel and the specialist in training should all participate in deciding upon and arranging the specifics of each field experience. Factors which enter into the decisions that are made are the needs of the practicum student and the opportunities available in public schools at that particular time. At the University of Wisconsin we have found that assigning practicum students to projects that are currently in operation and giving them carefully delineated responsibilities within those projects works well. However, we are always careful to allow room for some decision-making on the part of the student within his assignment. For example, one of our doctoral candidates was assigned to help central office staff members in Madison initiate a teacher-aide program designed to enable teachers to give corrective readers more help. With the help of a central office consultant the practicum student was required to plan and conduct in-service programs for teachers and aides, select instructional materials and communicate the progress of the project to principals and other central office staff. Another practicum student undertook the responsibility for providing several in-service programs to teachers in three rural elementary schools in Wisconsin. The student had to meet and plan with the principals and other district administrators as well as observe the teachers at work and offer helpful suggestions to them at their after-school meetings. Still another student worked with the members of the science department in a Madison senior high school to help them construct, administer and interpret informal reading inventories for their students. This project required coordination with the reading consultant employed in that particular high school.

Although it is sometimes tempting to use practicum students to perform relatively unsophisticated tasks at the central office level, these temptations should be resisted. Finding responsibilities that are challenging

without being overwhelming is not always easy, but every attempt should be made to see that the student has experiences at or near his level of sophistication. Sometimes short-term projects that meet the student's needs and are beneficial to the general interests of the central office reading department can be arranged. In-service education that is offered to a selected group of teachers and is relevant to a specific aspect of reading instruction can often be used effectively to give the prospective central office specialist the experience he needs in teacher education and at the same time improve one dimension of the district's reading program.

Conclusion

The basic principles that apply to the training of other reading specialists apply also to the training of central office reading personnel. Because of the broader range of responsibilities that fall under the central office "umbrella" and the variety of organizational structures and operating procedures from district to district it is more difficult to delineate a specific program of preparation. Perhaps the major difference between central office positions and other positions of specialization is that personnel in the central office are farther away from the students for whom their services are ultimately intended. The transition from a school building where daily contacts with students provide much job satisfaction to the central office where the impact of one's work is often not visible can be difficult. People making the transition must be given assurance that their new positions are needed and wanted and do bear fruit although it sometimes appears otherwise. Not everyone who aspires to a central office reading position finds the job satisfactory when he samples

it. Therefore, the training program leading to central office specialization should be looked upon as an opportunity to decide whether or not the trainee is suited to that level of specialization. The training period, then, should be perceived by all who are involved in the training as a testing as well as a preparatory process.

References

1. Austin, Mary C. "Professional Training of Reading Personnel." In Innovation and Change in Reading Instruction, The Sixty-seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 357-396.